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ABSTRACT

Perspectives on the roles of academic advisors are considered. It is suggested that academic advisors are often "boundary spanners," those who participate in two or more aspects of the activities of the institution. Academic advisors' functions cut across multidisciplinary lines, affecting curricular decisions and curriculum development, career planning and placement, serving orientation and retention programs, and articulating campus-wide and sometimes community referrals. Historically in postsecondary education in the United States, centralized or focused advising has been closely allied with professional schools and with single-purpose curricular offerings. The emergence of liberal arts, general education, or individualized study leads to decentralized advising, usually by an individual faculty member. As greater focus is directed to the relationship of education and employment, with specialized or preprofessional or professional education considered important to students and their parents, centralized advising has been rapidly developing. Catastrophe theory, which describes situations in which continuous changes in one variable may produce discontinuous changes in another vector, may be useful. It is suggested that academic advisors could be influential within the institution in the acceptance of professional skills and services, or in the development of a professional body of skills for implementation. Academic advisors have insight into the level of preparation of students, student life styles, and their aspiration and inspiration levels, and can instruct campus managers and faculty about the living and learning nature of students. By utilizing the concept of catastrophe theory, uncommon results can be anticipated or described. (SW)

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ACADEMIC ADVISORS - THE BOUNDARY SPANNERS

NACADA 1981 Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana
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INTRODUCTION: I want to acknowledge the very fine, cogent comments made by Dr. Thomas A. Kalvaynski, Assistant Provost of Ball State University. The concerns for students, and the concerns of students which he articulated provide a focus for academic advising for professional educators. If every institution had at least one spokesperson in academic administration who was as articulate, and who could be supportive of the concept and practice of academic advising, there probably would be little need for this national meeting, - NACADA's growth would be static, -and post-secondary education would not be in a "discovery mode" re the importance of your work. However, this is not the case.

Too often there is little or no orientation to "the advising function" provided for new teaching faculty; curricular matters are assumed to be provided by the "orientation folks" in student affairs, or "handled" at the time of admissions, or there is unspoken dependence upon informal peer "advising". A review of the history of higher education neatly reveals the low stature initially placed upon academic advising, and for good reason...initial participants were destined for the clergy, and the curriculum evolved to include the professions of law, engineering and later, medicine. Advisement, as such, was not a difficult matter, and the Advisor most frequently was also responsible for the entire curriculum...the President, later the Registrar. The exponential explosion of institutional offerings in the post-secondary sector of this nation is matched only by the complexity of academic advising for the multiplicity of consumer populations.

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The opportunity to share some concerns with this group stimulated a renewed interest in academic advising on my part, and resulted in an immediate study of the topic of centralized academic advising (which has been researched) and a careful consideration of the practices typically followed by general advisors, and also program directors at the graduate level. Although the leap to graduate students may seem foreign to a few of you, the graduate student of the 80s is very much akin to the undergraduate student of the past two decades...individuals who are upwardly mobile, and seeking greater depth of study, and/or a new profession. We encounter the displaced teacher, the former management executive, the "newly single" homemaker in middle-life crisis, and the twenty-one year old who has deferred decision-making to the post-undergraduate level... all seeking "academic counsel" as they enroll and select a curriculum.

Boundary Spanning: a term originally utilized in management theory which refers to organizational roles, within defined and budgetary units permitting an individual to work in more than one unit or subsystem within the organization. The individual is considered a member of more than one identifiable and identified units because of the spanning or crossing of the boundary or parameter of the employment unit and a single work role. The concept expands our understanding of a dual appointment.

In academic life the parallel for faculty members might be a joint initial or evolved appointment on a .50 FTE basis between social work and educational psychology, or between English and journalism, where the assignment is viewed as permanent, the contribution welcomed, and full participation is accorded to the individual. In student services a member of the residence halls staff may also be employed in financial aids, or a Counselor may teach

in the psychology department...boundary spanners provide the opportunity for participation in two defined tasks or functions, in two or more aspects of the activities of the institution. It seems to me that academic advisors represent classic models of expanded boundary spanning, -across multi-disciplinary lines, impacting curricular decisions and curriculum development, career planning and placement, serving orientation and retention programs, and articulating campus-wide and sometimes community referrals.

Boundary spanners provide information on a bi-modal basis, at least, and also serve as representatives of the one or more units. Academic advisors process, -on a simultaneous basis, -the latest curricular information, career trends and placement realities, and represent the academic "major" to the student. With this expanded horizon of activity comes concomitant stress, or stresses. Perceptions of students, of faculty groups (i.e. departments or other academic clusters being represented), of full-time faculty who may not perceive the full dimension of the centralized academic advising role as relevant, or as important as the classroom function may impact self-perceptions of advisors causing behavior shifts contrary to common practice.

However, academic advising, especially centralized advising is rapidly ceasing to be an innovation and advisors on some campuses already may be encapsulated in their own boundaried unit. There is some evidence that faculty groups on campuses with a long tradition of centralized advising are resentful of discussions about the return of the advising function to the teaching faculty; in a similar fashion, academic advisors are sometimes resistant to refer or to consult because of a vested interest in the student and the unique shared responsibility for individual

academic planning. There appear to be few point-in-time similarities between and among campuses, although the general trend, best represented by the interest and increasing membership in NACADA, seems to be toward generalized and centralized academic advising for the first two years or first-half of the undergraduate experience, and toward a coordinated advisement system for identifiable clusters of students as they move toward degree completion. The definition of "centralized" advising varies widely between campuses.

In fact, we may consider the current status of academic advising akin to that of the relatively new printer's symbol, the INTERROBANG. The Interrobang is a single and simple indicator of something incredible... it is a combination, or overprint of the questionmark, with an exclamation point. To visualize the Interrobang, begin at the bottom of the questionmark, using the same "dot" at the bottom, then continue upwards on the bottom stem of the questionmark, but extend (upwards) the broader stroke of the exclamation point into the semi-circle of the top loop of the questionmark. This is a legitimate and authentic printer's symbol, one of two changes endorsed after 210 years, and only recently utilized although endorsed in 1967. The single element is to replace the multiple use of questionmarks and/or exclamation points, and it denotes an incredible situation or statement, or pivotal point. Many of our academic instituions are at a pivotal point in financing, in staffing, in meeting curricular obligations, and perhaps in academic advising. As academic advisors, you combine the elements of instruction, counsel, information-giving, identification with the institution and professional staff, and you span the boundaries of "the system" in providing services to students in a unified manner.

The President of NACADA, Thomas J. Grites, has edited one of the first definitive works on academic advising, utilizing ERIC documents, and in conjunction with AAHE. As the doctoral dissertation advisor for Richard P. Baxter, cited for his 1969-71 study of the emergence of centralized academic advising functions in professional schools, I again noted the role of the single-focus school or college, typically business or engineering, as the initiator for centralized advising in the contemporary sense. Historically, in post-secondary education in this nation, centralized or focused advising has been closely allied with professional schools and with single-purpose curricular offerings. The emergence of liberal arts, general education, or individualized study leads to decentralized advising, usually by an individual faculty member. We are now emerging from several decades of educational and economic support for the generally and liberally educated, -and as we move toward greater focus on the relationship of education and employment, with specialized or pre-professional or professional education uppermost in the minds of students and their parents, we see the rapid development of centralized advising.

In many cases, the centralized advisement is staffed by faculty members and staff members who have established a reputation for "relating well with students"' faculty members who have channeled time and their energies toward the advising relationship, and academic staff, many from student or human services, who are known for generalist skills and student groups advising. Initially, these individuals may maintain their boundary roles, each having a special relationship with two or more major academic programs, -slowly moving toward more generalized advisement as students,

too, become boundary spanners. By this I refer to the increasingly common practice of an individual student wishing to have two or more certifications (if teaching is a goal) or two or more "majors", or a combination of an academic discipline with economics, marketing, journalism, computer science, etc.

"Boundary Spanning", when self-defined as duality, can have serious and devastating impacts...especially from the faculty and staff point of view. For the non-tenured, or limited contract academic employee, serving two distinctly different interests can be self-defeating. The well-educated and dual-skill area new faculty member who assumes two part-time departmental appointments is well-intentioned, well-utilized, well-regarded, but may not be tenured or retained in a period of instability or retrenchment when staff renewals depend upon student credit hour (SCH) productivity, and a combination of departmental service, committee assignments, publications, etc. Vested interest becomes just that - vested; in contrast, in the case of academic advising, the vested interest is in the student...orientation, adjustment, decision-making, academic performance, retention, successful completion.

The status relationship between student services personnel...on the dean of students staff and those faculty and staff who serve students as academic advisors is uniquely similar. Regardless of the history of the institution, the stated philosophy of education, the location of the campus, the age of the "parent" college, or the rankings of the athletics teams...there is a visible but unstated "status" accorded to the functions assigned to faculty and staff within the aegis of "education". Non-classroom and non-funded research activities are not regarded or accorded

the same status as the full-time faculty member. And, within the activities circumscribed by the concept of "faculty member", we must accept the general notion that "advising" was and is something that anyone can do, that completion of the advanced and discipline-oriented degree and assumption of teaching responsibilities somehow prepared the new faculty member to "advise" students. The advent of centralized advising removed this time-consuming and low-status activity from many faculty schedules. It did not, however, change the status of the activity in the collective faculty mind.

The resurgence of orientation concerns, retention activites, and the remarkable growth and development of this national organization and others with similar purposes is clear evidence of the importance of the activity at the administrative and management levels of our post-secondary institutions. By organizational patterns, we may have the opportunity to witness the changing status and power accorded to advising students at all levels. Creation of centralized advising, the linkages of advisors with other offices within the institution, e.g. admissions, career planning, housing and financial aids, also the involvement of academic advisors in academic retention committees, and with developmental education speaks for itself. The literature of the profession frequently speaks of academic advisement centers as "the Registrar's right arm".

Many consider academic advising a "powerless" profession, and nothing could be further from the truth. Centralized advising, and decisions by individuals who advise have unique collective power within the curriculum. I believe this is the reference to the "Registrar's Arm" frequently noted.

Selections of general education classes, suggestions for electives, election of physical education or "equivalent" courses, all contribute to the filling of classes. Within established guidelines, academic advisors can redefine the curriculum. As you assess study skills and other academic tool skill levels, your referrals to developmental programming can assist, build, sustain or withdraw support. Centralized academic advisors collectively can be the Retention Officer. Two recent articles in the Journal of College Student Personnel, authored by officers in this NACADA organization, speak directly to the role of advising in retention, from an admittedly different point of view from that just expressed. In any event, advising, good advising, can reduce attrition. As an academic planner you can increase, maintain and reduce SCH for colleges, and impact the competition between and among departments, divisions, colleges, majors, etc. As an educator you impact student decisions; as a manager and administrator your impact is exponentially described. How many boundaries do you, can you, should you span? Is it possible to describe or explain the influence which it is possible to exert as an academic advisor?

In assessing the power and scope of academic advising, perhaps the Catastrophe Theory developed by Dr. E. C. Zeeman has practical and workable implications. One of seven elementary models described initially to explain the catalytic role in chemical reactions...the "Cusp" Theory seems to have the greatest application in the collegiate sector, and for academic advising. Again, let me use words to describe a visual model of unexplained, and in this case, social "change". Imagine

a series of undulating or folding pleats or ruffles...the "action-reaction" surface. At the lower, or outer edge, is the "ruffle" or pleat; at the upper end is the flattened edge of that pleat, or a relatively smooth surface. The Cusp theory is unique in that it provides for a two-dimensional action-reaction, without the algebraic notion that we typically encounter, e.g. if action occurs in a right to left manner, then there is an equal reduction in right to left. The Cusp theory accounts for two and non-linear actions. The Catastrophe Theory, Cusp Model, can graphically explain and describe a dramatic change in curricular patterns; in enrollment figures and economic factors; and, in the results of particularized academic advising, as an example.

(Insert Figure #1 and Figure #2 here)

This model is offered as a result of personal curiosity about cross-discipline applications of this theory. The majority of cause-and-effect models are based upon a smooth, and dependent relationship between variables in which continuous levels of change in one dimension lead to similarly smooth change levels in another. Catastrophe Theory is a method to display discontinuous processes and changes in structure and response (useful in complex organizations, i.e. collegiate institutions). Catastrophe theory describes situations in which continuous changes in one variable may produce discontinuous changes in another vector. The theory is based on the principle that systems including a wide variety of forms can be graphically described by a relatively smooth (top) surface of equilibrium. The breakdown of the surface, or disruption, is called a "catastrophe". Such a catastrophe could be the impact on the higher educational institution

such as (1) the shift in a mathematics education major to computer science; (2) "transfer shock" as experienced by the student.

Figure #1 describes the "ruffled surface" resulting from the undulating cusps...while the behavior or action surface appears to be smooth. Moving from A to B moves the impact of that decision further toward the "cusp"; accordingly as C to D is enacted (the second variable), the degree of impact is variably determined according to the initiating point on the A to B vector.

Therefore, (Figure 2) if an established mathematics education program, with falling or stable enrollment, shifts (A to B at mid-point) to a computer science major to obtain more students, an unanticipated cost factor A to C can occur almost immediately due to the need for micro-computers, cards, computer time, etc. (X to Y). Similarly, any reduction in total curricular offerings from a broad liberal arts curriculum to a more closely defined professional curriculum can produce an "unexplained" catastrophe in a trajectory of costs, enrollment and staffing implications which could be described as Y to X. A brand new program, which does not utilize currently enrolled students or retrained faculty or existing equipment (U to V) can be described in a predictive manner since it is less likely to encounter "cusps" in early stages, or until enrollment builds (A to B).

This two-dimension model has interesting ramifications for observable and oftimes difficult to explain behavior. Another example might be "transfer shock"...a student may or may not respond according to the anticipated academic performance, -depending upon the prior institution, personal maturity of the student, chosen major, intelligence, etc.

A freshman enters at point A (Figure 2) and progresses to graduation, point C. A transfer student enters as a sophomore or junior (close to point B, senior status) at point X, and immediately encounters a cusp - arriving at point Y after one semester, -not a smooth transition.

Perhaps you can utilize this model to assist students in academic planning, or in your interactions with faculty as they project curricular modifications that you question as a "clinical hunch"; Catastrophe Theory merely graphically indicates disruption in an understandable form. And, in the event that economic or political factors impinge upon the planned continuance of advising as a centralized function, utilize the Cusp aspect to demonstrate the possible impact on student curricular planning, on retention, etc. (Y to X as an example).

Boundary spanner, academic advisors have informational access, and therefore shared power in the management of institutions of higher education. Curricular erosion is a quick and clear sign of collegiate dry rot, -when SCH generation takes precedence over quality and cohesive programs of education. A national trend is reflected in most institutions...a re-definition of liberal education, a withdrawal of support for liberal education and the humanities, and a redefinition of general education. Nationally, there is a concern for the quality of education and the competencies reflected in the high school diploma...what can you assume about a graduate of an accredited high school? In terms of the assumed science and mathematical knowledge, the understandings of the human condition, the awareness of the social sciences, English as a tool subject, an awareness of another language or culture, or general maturity expected of the legally determined adult...has the awarding of the high school

diploma signalled "commencement" as an adult who is well educated or well prepared?

An adaptation of the "SPAN PLAN" developed at Purdue University is the final "mini-model" which may be of assistance to academic advisors. Again, your mental imagery is requisite. From left to right, draw a straight life line. Individuals under the age of twenty are projected to live to nearly 100 years of age, in reasonably good health and the physical and intellectual vigor of a sixty-five year old in good health today. At the beginning of this horizontal line place a small vertical line...birth. A short distance to the right, a quarter of an inch, another vertical line... kindergarten. You can project when the first ability test, reading readiness test, interest might have been administered; eighth grade or sixth grade graduation and some decisions about the "pre-college" track of courses. High school graduation is another short vertical line, and our college student has now been chronicled to the age of eighteen, -of the projected lifetime expectancy of 100. You can place vertical lines for changes of major, transfer of institutions, drop-outs and stop-outs, for full-time employment, for marriage, children, geographic moves, re-entry to higher education, etc. Planning for the span of lifetime activities of adults in our culture is an integral aspect of academic planning, and certainly demonstrates "boundary" spanning.

Many of the active participants in higher education appear to "talk" or to write about the so-called non-traditional returning adult and education, in descriptive terms with greater success than performance or experience may support. The entire area of the returning and mature adult student, the re-entry student of over forty years remains well described,

but under-researched and with spotty demonstrable results. The human services for students, -including non-intellective aspects of admissions, financial planning, residence life, campus transportation, "student activities", health services, insurance and other special service programs, classroom instruction and academic advising are all geared for the 18 to 25 year old. A unique article was published in the September 1979 Journal of College Student Personnel entitled "A Septigenarian in the Sequestered Halls of Higher Learning." This descriptive article chronicles the computer generated letters, and regulations encountered by a 74 year old former university educator as he returned to formal undergraduate collegiate education as a student. Courted by the ROTC and fraternities, hounded by insurance companies, an individual pitied by freshmen students who wondered why he had no "bib overalls", bedeviled by creative writing instructors who expressed concern that his stories had no sex and drug themes, and threatened by residence staff who noted he was living off-campus illegally, -this author made a strong comment about the structuring of collegiate education for an age-grouping, with less appropriate and adjustive mechanisms for the returning adult. How have academic advisors tailored their activities? Can the boundary of age be spanned as easily as race, gender, or geographic background implications? Studies by Astin, and a recent doctoral dissertation by DelDin report that non-traditional (adult) students who are dissatisfied with the post-secondary experience most frequently note that additional or better academic advising would have been helpful. Maturation and sophistication of student groupings do not satisfy the need for qualified and appropriate academic advising.

The topic of your annual conference appears to be right "on target"... academic advising is the pivotal point; for student retention

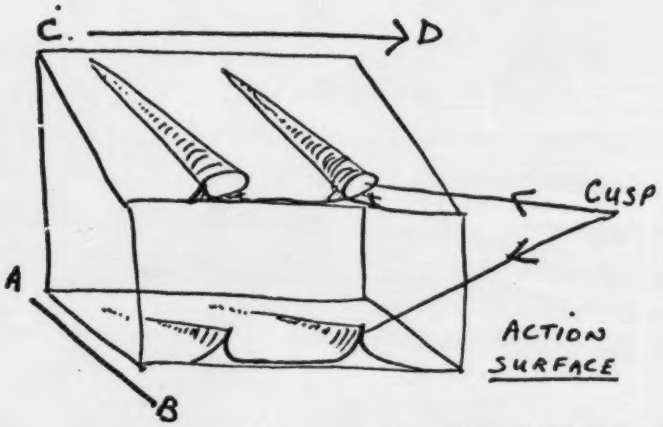
and satisfaction, for faculty and curriculum development and balance. It may be that the concept of centralized academic advising is at a pivotal point within your institution; academic advisors, as entities could be at a critical pivotal point in the acceptance of professional skills and services, or in the development of a professional body of skills for implementation. The highly professional publication, the journal, of NACADA will have a positive impetus in the recognition of advising services within the educational context; cost benefits will be addressed at an early stage within each institution. If economic concerns remain paramount, centralized advising will phase down; however, demonstrated cost-benefits to the institution by academic advising will be a significant persuader. Accessing and processing information to students, and dissemination of benefits and results of quality academic advising to the institution will be necessary.

It is not your role to define and describe the incoming student. However, you know the student, far beyond the descriptive profiling. Because of boundary spanning you have better insight into level of preparation in contrast to test score performance; informing faculty about anticipated performance byond test scores will be helpful information for classroom interactions. What can you share about student life styles, aspiration and inspiration levels, how far can you project insights about the young people who will be in the classroom? The realities of coping behaviors extend beyond concern for students. Contributing survival is a concern for academic advising as an art beyond an add-on to a typical faculty teaching load.

Boundary spanners, pivotal people who are academic advisors may stem

the tide of erosion of curricular integrity which is becoming visible in the liberal arts; academic advisors must interact responsibly with students, and instruct campus managers and faculty about the living-learning nature of their students; by utilizing the concept of Catastrophe Theory we can anticipate or describe some uncommon results we all observe. To span the boundary of information and access may be your next pivotal play, in the instructional game of our post-secondary collegiate challenge.

#1



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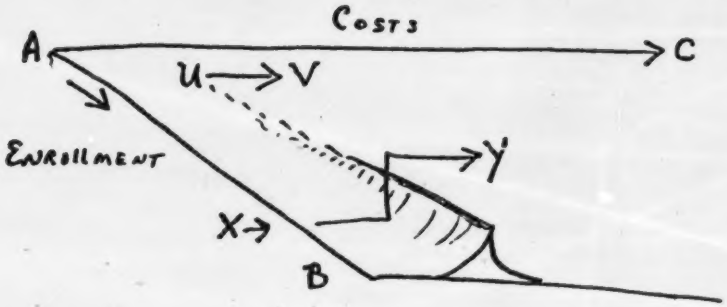

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